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Held at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 28 November 2003, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. Loedel ..... (Uruguay)

Contents

Agenda item 86 : Questions relating to information *(continued)*

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 86: Questions relating to information *(continued)* (A/58/21, A/58/175, A/58/16 (chap. III B, programme 23) and A/58/90, annex)

1. **Mr. Fallouh** (Syrian Arab Republic) associated himself with the statement made by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. His country attached great importance to achieving a new, more equitable and effective international information order that reflected United Nations principles, international legitimacy and the concerns, expectations and cultural values of peoples so as to usher in a world in which justice, equality and mutual respect reigned. One important function of the United Nations was to emphasize security issues on which United Nations bodies had adopted decisions and which the Security Council, among others, had also considered, such as the struggle against foreign occupation and the international community's mobilization to end it.

2. His delegation had noted the Secretary-General's decision to close the United Nations information centres in Western Europe in order to create a single regional hub in Brussels, as a first step towards applying a similar approach to other regions over the next three years. Given the importance of the information centres for developing countries, each case must be considered separately and host countries must be consulted before a decision was taken.

3. He commended the Department of Public Information for its initiatives to improve the United Nations web site, which received 10 million accesses a day. Further efforts should be made to achieve a balance among the six official languages, to distribute human and financial resources more equitably and to publish documents in the six official languages. The Department should forge more partnerships with the media and non-governmental organizations in order to disseminate the Organization's messages more effectively to public opinion throughout the world. His delegation was concerned, however, that such partnerships were being established with outside entities that did not inspire confidence.

4. One of the main objectives of the reorientation of United Nations information activities was to bridge the digital divide between the developed and the developing countries. His delegation hoped that the new structure of the Department of Public Information would help achieve that objective and continue the reform process within a framework of transparency and coordination among all Member States.

5. **Mr. Tarui** (Japan) said that his delegation would like to encourage the Secretary-General to apply quickly the reform elements that came under his authority, in keeping with the relevant resolutions and decisions already adopted on public information. In that connection, it appreciated the practical initiatives adopted in the past year to restructure the Department of Public Information and the measures taken to enhance the effectiveness of its products and activities.

6. His Government greatly appreciated the concept of "strategic communications services" described in the Secretary-General's report (A/58/175) and hoped that the Department of Public Information would continue providing its communications services with more strategic priorities. It welcomed the practical initiatives undertaken by the Department in recent months in accordance with the Secretary-General's report entitled "Strengthening of the United Nations: an agenda for further change" (A/57/387).

7. The importance attached by his Government to the United Nations Information Centre in Tokyo was reflected in the assistance it gave to the Department of Public Information for the Centre's public information activities. In recent years, it had contributed some $200,000 annually for the Centre's activities and the assistance provided to the Department over the past five years totalled over $2 million.

8. The Secretary-General planned to pursue the regionalization of United Nations information centres using the "guidelines and criteria for the regionalization of United Nations information centres" annexed to his report. In that connection, his delegation wished to point out that the "guidelines and criteria" should reflect not only the element of rent-free premises but also the overall support of a host Government. It suggested that the "guidelines and criteria" should be amended accordingly.

9. As stated in General Assembly resolution 57/130, "information in the local languages has the strongest impact on the local populations". The United Nations

Information Centre in Tokyo played a crucial role in giving the Japanese public a better understanding of United Nations activities through its information in Japanese. The Department of Public Information should continue its information activities in various local languages.

10. The Third Tokyo International Conference on African Development had concluded successfully on 1 October 2003. The conference process, which was celebrating its tenth year, was evidence of Japan's firm commitment to African development. His delegation full supported the Secretary-General's idea that the United Nations should perform an essential outreach function and it hoped that the Organization's public information activities in support of African development would be strengthened. One example of Japan's support for the activities of the Department of Public Information in that regard was the invitation it had extended to a journalist from the quarterly Africa Recovery to attend the Third Conference.

11. **Mr. Al-Sharifi** (Yemen) said that his delegation had listened with keen interest to the Under-Secretary-General's statement introducing the Secretary-General's report (A/58/175). It was grateful for the new vision evidenced in the report, which reflected his Government's expectations of finding the best way to inform the public about United Nations activities and bodies. His delegation was also grateful for the initiatives taken to publicize the Organization's activities in the six official languages.

12. His delegation had noted the information given by the Secretary-General on the closure of the United Nations information centres in Western Europe in order to create a regional hub and hoped that the savings made would benefit other regions. Account must be taken of the specific characteristics of each region, especially developing regions, and information centres should be strengthened. In particular, strengthening the Sanaa information centre would benefit Yemen and the Arabian Peninsula as a whole, since the centre had helped consolidate the principles of the United Nations and its bodies. He thanked the Department of Public Information for its understanding and the efforts made to reactivate that centre.

13. Lastly, his delegation attached importance to bridging the digital divide in order to protect the interests of developing countries and find a strategy that would help achieve a balance in the information area.

14. **Mr. U Linn Myaing** (Myanmar) associated himself with the statement made by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Since the Department of Public Information was to be guided by the priorities laid down by the General Assembly, in particular the Millennium Declaration, and by those established by the Secretary-General, which included the eradication of poverty, sustainable development, the HIV/AIDS epidemic and combating terrorism, it was bound to be successful.

15. His Government was doing its utmost to ensure that the entire population of the country had access to news and information. With regard to the traditional media, radio programmes had had been expanded and were also being broadcast in several local languages. Measures were being taken to install frequency-modulated relay stations to benefit those living in remote border areas. The establishment of 160 television relay stations throughout the country had given 87.4 per cent of the population access to television. The recent use of global transponders on two satellites made it possible for viewers in 156 countries in Asia, Africa, Australasia, Europe and the Americas to watch Myanmar television programmes.

16. His country faced the challenge of capitalizing on the steady, rapid advance in information and communication technology (ICT). In order not to be left behind, his Government had systematically taken the necessary measures, from establishing the Myanmar Computer Science Development Council to guide the incipient ICT industry to setting up the Myanmar Computer Science Federation to develop computer science in the country. With regard to legislation, the computer science development law had been promulgated and a comprehensive cyber law was being drafted.

17. Three years previously, an electronic education system had been introduced in Myanmar with the establishment of a data broadcasting network via satellite. Thus far, 450 e-learning centres had been opened throughout the country, providing training opportunities to students in rural and urban areas. The network was also being used for the distance printing of newspapers in cities outside the capital. The Ministry of Information was setting up electronic libraries throughout the country and inhabitants of

remote areas had the option of consulting online editions of daily newspapers.

18. His country was working with its partners in the region, such as Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Japan, the Republic of Korea and India, to develop ICT and was grateful for the assistance and cooperation provided by them. Its e-National Task Force, made up of Government officials, technicians and business people, was also applying the initiatives of the e-ASEAN Framework Agreement, to which Myanmar was a signatory.

19. There continued to be a digital divide between developed and developing countries. Much remained to be done to bridge it and his delegation believed that the United Nations could play an increasing role in that regard. It hoped that the World Summit on the Information Society would offer opportunities to help the developing countries begin to catch up with the more advanced nations, so that they too could reap the benefits offered by ICT.

20. **Mr. Awad** (Egypt) associated himself with the statement made by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. He emphasized the importance of the work done by the Department of Public Information and the Committee on Information at a decisive stage in their history, especially since recent events in Iraq and in the occupied Palestinian and other Arab territories had called into question the prestige of the United Nations and its position as a source of international legitimacy.

21. His delegation had taken part in the twenty-fifth session of the Committee on Information and in the drafting of the resolution reflecting the changes made in the Department, which he hoped would be adopted at the end of the general debate. Those changes must be commensurate with the aspirations and concerns of the Member States with regard to the definition of United Nations information goals, in order to arrive at an information policy that was in keeping with the spirit of the times and consistent with countries' need for reliable, objective information.

22. Constructive cooperation between the Committee on Information and the Department of Public Information must be strengthened and made more transparent so that the Committee was free to fulfil its mandate. There must also be ongoing institutional interaction between the Department and the officers of the Fourth Committee between General Assembly sessions, so that the Fourth Committee was kept informed of plans for managing the various elements and areas of work and of the views of Member States, especially in setting priorities.

23. His delegation did not wish to go into detail about the priorities of United Nations information policy, at least not at that stage, but it would like to mention, as examples, multilingualism and the need for a balance among the six official languages; outreach by United Nations information centres within countries; and the need to diversify the information media used, from radio programmes to electronic media.

24. The United Nations information message should reflect the priority issues of the Millennium Declaration and the objective content of that message required clear, ongoing coordination among the Department of Public Information, the various Secretariat units and the organs and programmes of the United Nations at Headquarters and elsewhere. His delegation hoped that the Communications Group would be able to work effectively. The Department must also be strengthened to keep it abreast of international events as well as the content of the Millennium Declaration.

25. He hoped that the United Nations information message would help to strengthen the dialogue among cultures and the culture of peace, to differentiate between terrorism and the legitimate struggle of peoples under foreign occupation and to bridge the digital divide between developed and developing countries. It was important that the Department of Public Information establish a clear strategy for addressing ideas in a balanced, objective manner so that the United Nations information message could rally international public opinion to support United Nations reform and contribute to United Nations goals.

26. **Mr. Neil** (Jamaica), speaking on behalf of the Caribbean Community, associated himself with the statement made by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. His Government supported the restructuring of the Department of Public Information and welcomed the progress being made in improving the Department's communication and dissemination activities, as well as the fact that despite the turbulence of recent months the Department's work continued to be guided by the priorities laid down in the Millennium Declaration.

27. The fundamental role played by the United Nations in meeting the need for objective, balanced information was highlighted by the existence of a media monopoly that reduced access to balanced news coverage, especially where developing countries were concerned. The Caribbean Community therefore supported the Organization's efforts to broadcast its message to all the peoples of the world.

28. Noting that national and regional needs would be taken into account in creating regional information hubs, he recalled that concerned regions and countries must be consulted. In that context, he reaffirmed the importance of the United Nations information centre in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, and the need to establish an enhanced information component in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) office in Kingston, Jamaica.

29. Traditional media remained essential for most of the Caribbean population. His delegation was satisfied with United Nations Radio programming, which covered almost the entire region, and requested that resources continue to be allocated to live radio so that it could be made a permanent feature of the Department's activities. At the same time, it encouraged the Secretariat to consider new ways of broadening the language coverage of programmes broadcast in the region.

30. With regard to language parity, he noted the contribution of the United Nations web site and, more specifically, the links to the Official Document System (ODS). The Caribbean Community welcomed efforts to make that system freely accessible by 2004. It was impressed by the services provided by the Dag Hammarskjold Library, particularly its training programmes for staff of depository libraries, and by the Department's promotional activities, especially the organization of both travelling exhibitions and exhibitions at Headquarters.

31. **Mr. Chowdhury** (Bangladesh) also associated himself with the statement made by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. At a time when the role of the United Nations was being called into question, it was essential to restore trust in the Organization by brining it closer to a wider public. He praised the Department of Public Information, which had always been in the forefront of that task.

32. He welcomed the progress made in expanding the United Nations web site, which was receiving more and more accesses, and encouraged the Department to continue that work, for the benefit of developing countries in particular. Traditional means of communication must not be neglected, however, particularly radio, which remained the most effective, affordable and widespread medium. The Department must continue to forge partnerships with local, national and regional broadcasters in order to transmit the United Nations message to all corners of the world, while maintaining existing programmes in a variety of non-official languages.

33. He emphasized the importance of the United Nations information centres for publicizing and promoting the Organization's activities in developing countries. In particular, he noted with gratitude the work of the Dhaka news centre. The centres must be strengthened and while his delegation supported their regionalization, that process must be carried out on a flexible, individualized basis and in consultation with the countries concerned.

34. The Department's work was very important for peace and security. Providing appropriate information backstopping for peacekeeping operations was essential for ensuring the safety of staff and the success of missions. His delegation therefore welcomed the coordination and cooperation between the Department of Public Information and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. It also hoped that the reform of the Department of Public Information would help bridge the digital divide between developed and developing countries and benefit the latter. In that context, it emphasized the importance of the forthcoming World Summit on the Information Society.

35. **Mr. Tan** (Singapore) said that information was vitally important as a complement to United Nations policy-making. However, the Organization's voice risked being drowned in the deluge of information vying for the world's attention. In order to be heard, the United Nations message must be clear and well defined and reach the largest possible number of people. Moreover, the recent debate on the relevance of the role of the United Nations had highlighted the importance of a more vigorous information policy and, despite the difficulties it entailed, a strong communication strategy must be developed and constantly reviewed. An integrated approach was needed that incorporated the different aspects of the United Nations, meaning that the Department of Public Information must increase its cooperation with the

relevant United Nations departments in order to gain a better understanding of and prioritize the issues to be addressed. The Department must focus on the overall picture, not on individual activities.

36. A strong communication strategy could not be achieved without an equally strong news infrastructure. To meet the growing demand for information, the Department must adopt innovative media and newer, faster technologies and optimize the tools it already had. In that connection, his delegation welcomed the proposals to strengthen and centralize communications through the web site, rationalize information centres and improve the management of United Nations libraries. However, the reform of the Department must address the needs and practical considerations of Member States and take account of the digital divide in order to determine in each case the most effective combination of new and traditional communication media.

37. For all those reasons, his delegation not only acknowledged the measures taken to promote multilingualism in United Nations information resources but also fully supported the restructuring of the Department, since the Secretary-General's objective of revitalizing the Organization and restoring public confidence in it could not be achieved without a strong information policy. Reform of the information sector was thus crucial and urgent.

38. **Mr. Choo Jong-youn** (Republic of Korea) noted with satisfaction the progress made in the reform and restructuring of the Department of Public Information and expressed full support for the rationalization of United Nations information centres. Before going ahead with the latter, however, the mandate of each centre, including its regional coverage and its activities, would have to be carefully examined.

39. His delegation commended the Department's work on the web site, which was the most affordable medium for transmitting the United Nations message throughout the world. Although language parity must be promoted, existing resource constraints called for a more practical approach.

40. Despite the need to use new technologies in outreach activities, the importance of traditional means of communication, such as radio, for millions of people was not in doubt. His delegation was in favour of expanding existing programmes using other local languages, which must chosen on the basis of clear, transparent criteria.

41. His delegation fully supported the work of the Steering Committee for the Modernization and Integrated Management of United Nations Libraries, whose aim was to create an effective network of library services throughout the Organization. It valued the outreach activities carried out by the Dag Hammarskjold Library through its 405 depository libraries in 146 countries. The cost-effectiveness of the depository libraries system must be examined, using the outreach activities of each one as a basis.

42. **M. Nambiar** (India) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and fully supported the process of restructuring and revitalizing the Department of Public Information. As the mouthpiece of the United Nations, the Department must be dynamic and in constant evolution in order to disseminate the Organization's message properly. It should also step up its campaign to promote the purposes and principles of the United Nations and multilateralism, which was currently of unprecedented importance.

43. The reform process must address the pressing information and technology needs of the developing world in order to bridge the digital divide and must place more emphasis on the basic socioeconomic issues of development, which remained priorities for the majority of Member States: the developing countries. In that context, while he commended the proposal to transform United Nations information centres into regional hubs in the developed countries, where they were costly for the Department to run and the resources thus released could be assigned to other priority areas, he felt that the process should be implemented cautiously in other regions, on a case-by-case basis and in consultation with concerned countries.

44. The decision to conduct an annual programme impact review was especially useful, since it introduced self-evaluation into the day-to-day work of all programme managers as a means of institutionalizing performance management. Both factors were essential for the success of activities to reform the Department, since they enabled them to be adapted to a constantly evolving environment while discarding all ineffective, obsolete or unnecessary elements. At the same time, the cost-effectiveness of

the resources needed for that purpose must be kept clearly in mind.

45. Since most developing countries lacked the necessary infrastructure and resources to reap the benefits of ICT, radio remained one of the most affordable and accessible traditional means of communication for publicizing United Nations activities, particularly in the areas of development and peacekeeping. For that reason, the Department should continue to promote the radio broadcasting capacity of the United Nations by forging partnerships with local, national and regional broadcasters.

46. Lastly, his delegation supported the initiative to integrate and modernize United Nations libraries, in particular the decision to create a Multilingual United Nations Libraries Research Gateway on the Internet and a master list of core areas of specialization available at United Nations libraries worldwide.

47. **Mr. Ri** (People's Democratic Republic of Korea) said that the development of ICT and the sharing of its benefits were crucial for supporting sustainable development. However, the gap between developed and developing countries in the sphere of public information was growing steadily, making it urgent to establish an equitable international information and communication order. To that end and as a first step, the public information monopoly and its abuse for selfish purposes must be halted. The developing world's attempts to promote cooperation in that sphere in order to create an international climate conducive to global democracy, peace and security came up against artificial means of control which were flooding the world with distorted information in the service of unilateral political and economic interests. Some countries undertook to propagate the notion that their nuclear weapons were intended for peaceful purposes, while other countries' capacity for self-defence and nuclear deterrence allegedly posed a threat to world peace. As a result, the States Members of the United Nations must ensure that public information activities fostered understanding and cooperation among nations and promoted sustainable development on the basis of respect for sovereignty and the principle of impartiality.

48. Secondly, any attempt to manipulate public information must be categorically rejected as means of infringing the sovereignty and interfering in the internal affairs of a country. Some countries distorted public information as a form of psychological warfare designed to corrupt developing countries' peoples and impose on them ideological and cultural values that sought to instigate political instability and socioeconomic chaos. Public information was even used as a weapon to provoke the overthrow of sovereign States, in flagrant violation of the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

49. Thirdly, public information was meant to serve the whole of humankind. Building the capacity of developing countries in that sphere was essential for restoring the true meaning of public information and guaranteeing its impartiality and objectivity. Accordingly, the United Nations and other international organizations must renew the developing countries' public information infrastructures and intensify international cooperation in the form of expert training, technology transfer and investment.

50. **Mr. Requeijo** (Cuba) said that his delegation shared the concerns expressed in the statement made by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. The application of scientific advances in the field of information and communications was not evenly distributed, since use of the Internet and other media was growing steadily in the developed world while subsistence continued to be the priority for the vast majority of the world's population. There was an urgent need, therefore, to create a new world information and communications order that would help bridge the growing technological divide between rich and poor countries. That recurrent demand was deliberately ignored by the owners of the major networks that controlled and manipulated information in the developed countries, who kept on trying to convince the developing world that it must resign itself to accepting its share of distorted information in order to satisfy interests of political, economic and ideological domination. The United Nations had a vital role to play in the search for practical solutions that would enable the developing countries to assume their role as active counterparts in the use of information resources.

51. He commended the work done to develop and update the United Nations web site so that the information available on the Internet could reach the whole world, although it was necessary to continue promoting the use of official languages other than English in order to do so. It was also essential to allocate the necessary resources for making and

disseminating United Nations radio and television programmes.

52. The strengthening of relations among States must be supported by objective, impartial and non-discriminatory information that took account of the intrinsic social and cultural characteristics of peoples. The use of information to subvert the internal order of other States, infringe their sovereignty and interfere in their internal affairs was illegal. Despite the different resolutions adopted by the United Nations to prevent the misuse or exploitation of information for criminal or terrorist ends, the United States Government continued to finance and encourage illegal transmissions to Cuba that misrepresented the situation in the country, encouraged illegal immigration, advocated violence and terrorism and persuaded people to break the law and violate the rule of law.

53. Cuba received transmissions of destabilizing propaganda from 16 radio and television stations situated in United States territory that generated more than 300 hours a day of programming that was anything but objective, balanced and truthful. One of those stations, Radio y Television Marti, was Government-owned and had an annual budget of some US$ 35 million. On 20 May 2003, the station had used four new frequencies that had caused interference on Cuban radio transmissions and had availed itself of a United States Air Force plane to transmit the television signal at peak viewing time, using channels reserved by law for Cuban stations. Such destabilizing aggressions threatened Cuba's sovereignty and flagrantly violated international law and the norms universally agreed in the framework of the International Telecommunications Union.

54. **Mr. Trepelkov** (Russian Federation) welcomed the measures taken by the Department of Public Information to reorganize United Nations information activities. The overall implementation of the proposed reforms had been positive and should remain so, in keeping with the policy of promoting a culture of communication and enhancing the coordination and effectiveness of communications among all United Nations organs. The newly created Strategic Communications Division was playing a prominent and positive role in that process.

55. The Department should focus its work in particular on the dissemination of information about the maintenance of international peace and the campaign against new security problems, principally international terrorism. The question of the security of international information was one of Russia's priorities in that regard. His delegation had in fact submitted to the General Assembly at its current session a draft resolution entitled "Developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security", which had already been adopted by the First Committee. The draft resolution, on the security of international information, was an important step forward in the legal regulation of information and the promotion of a secure environment for communications on a just and equitable basis.

56. His delegation supported the current process of restructuring the Department and hoped that the new operating model would contribute to the effective application of the strategic goals of the United Nations reform process. Accordingly, it acknowledged the importance of the goal of designing a programme impact evaluation system and awaited with interest the first annual review, to be submitted to the Committee on Information for consideration at its twenty-sixth session, in 2004.

57. His delegation supported the process of consolidating the network of United Nations information centres into regional hubs and believed that the resources thus released should be reassigned to other important priority activities of the Department of Public Information. The United Nations should also pay more attention to the new social role of ICT. The development of such technology should take account of the need to guarantee people more democratic access to knowledge and information. The Internet was also an aspect of globalization and the United Nations should work to ensure that it was more accessible and beneficial.

58. The Department's efforts to update the United Nations web site had borne fruit, as shown by its increasing popularity with users the world over. In particular, the United Nations site in Russian, which the Russian Service was constantly improving and updating, received an increasing number of accesses. However, United Nations substantive departments could do more to help update the web sites by posting their most important documents in all the official languages, instead of just the working languages. The Russian News Centre, another important initiative of the Department, was gaining in popularity among Russian users.

59. In general, his delegation shared the view of the Department's managers that a global approach must be taken to increasing the transparency of the United Nations and strengthening its authority by maximizing coverage in all parts of the world and using all existing communication channels. The aim was to create a synergy between the latest technologies and traditional media such as press and radio. The pilot project for an international broadcasting capacity for the United Nations occupied a well-deserved place among the Department's other initiatives and clearly demonstrated the Department's commitment to the principle of multilingualism. For several consecutive years, members of the Committee on Information had given the project a unanimously positive rating.

60. His delegation viewed as timely the measures taken by the Department to expand the capacity of the United Nations to provide information promptly to the media. The transcripts of press conferences given by the Spokesman for the Secretary-General, together with news bulletins, press releases and the newly created electronic mail service, were a valuable information resource for national news agencies. The proposal to transfer the Cartographic Section from the Department of Public Information to the Department of Peacekeeping Operations was also justified.

61. His delegation supported the establishment of the Steering Committee for the Modernization and Integrated Management of United Nations Libraries, entrusted with making impartial recommendations for a more efficient and accessible system of library services in the United Nations. In conclusion, his delegation believed that the decisions adopted at the current session on questions relating to information would contribute to achieving the objectives pursued in that sphere and would serve as a basis for future activities.

62. **Mr. Marsh** (United States of America) said that his delegation welcomed the Secretary-General's report in document A/58/175. He also emphasized the important recommendations contained in the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the 2002 review of the structure and operations of United Nations information centres (A/57/747) and said that the Department of Public Information needed to take into account the existence of other offices of the United Nations system at the regional level in order to avoid duplication. The network of information centres had been built up in an ad hoc manner over the years and while his delegation fully acknowledged the validity of host countries' views concerning the regionalization decision-making process, it urged all those concerned to set aside their parochial interests and seize the opportunity afforded by the regionalization process to create a system of regional information hubs that was better suited to the needs of all Member States. Moreover, while his delegation did not question the need to redirect the human and financial resources released by the creation of the regional hub in Brussels towards strengthening the communication components of developing countries, it did question the appropriateness of allocating those resources before the region in question underwent the regionalization review process, since that would undermine the regionalization process envisaged by the General Assembly.

63. His delegation awaited with interest the linkage of the Official Document System (ODS) to the United Nations web site, which would help to significantly enhance it multilingualism by providing free access to all the Organization's parliamentary documentation in the six official languages and would increase the efficiency of the whole system by eliminating the need for format conversion and document duplication. While it commended the Secretariat's efforts to achieve parity in the use of the six official languages, it noted that multilingualism, as defined in that context, could not be equated with universality. The six official languages were the first language of less than 40 per cent of the world's population. The United Nations web site was a tool, not an official document in electronic format. He wondered whether using the Secretariat's human and financial resources to try to achieve language parity on the web site was justified in the light of other priorities agreed by all the Member States. Moreover, to best fulfil the Department's basic mission of informing the peoples of the world about the important work done in their name, it would be more beneficial and equitable to post the Organization's important documents on the United Nations web site in other languages in addition to the six official ones, as suggested by the representatives of Japan and the Republic of Korea.

64. His delegation viewed the Cyberschoolbus web site and the "UN works" programme as central to the educational outreach programme of the Department of Public Information. It questioned the usefulness of the UN Chronicle and believed that the Department's human and financial resources could be put to better use in other activities.

65. During consideration of the Secretary-General's report (A/57/387) at the recent session of the Committee on Information, his delegation had given its full support to action 9 on the integration of the libraries of the United Nations system. It regretted that the Dag Hammarskjold Library was not assuming its responsibility for setting policy and coordinating the work of all United Nations libraries and called on the Library's managers to take on a leadership role in the newly established Steering Committee for the Modernization and Integrated Management of United Nations Libraries. It also hoped that the Committee on Information would review the impact of the Steering Committee's initiatives at its next session.

66. His delegation commended the Department for putting in place its new organizational structure, in particular for appointing coordinators to work with substantive departments on the formulation of information programmes and media strategies on priority issues. It also noted with satisfaction that the Department's Strategic Communications Division was acting as secretariat for the United Nations Communications Group and it commended the Department for guiding the Group in designing joint communication strategies and promotional campaigns with other United Nations bodies on several international conferences and global celebrations.

67. Lastly, his delegation noted with satisfaction that the Department had worked closely with the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) and other partners of the United Nations system to develop a communication strategy for the World Summit on the Information Society, to be held in Geneva in December. It also emphasized the fundamental importance of the freedoms of expression and of the press enshrined in article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

68. Replying to the statement by the representative of Cuba, he said he hoped that the Fourth Committee's work would focus on the items on the agenda and that his delegation was open to dialogue but not diatribe. As in the past, however, the Cuban delegation had chosen to politicize the Committee. His Government had complied firmly with its international obligations, in particular those on avoiding any harmful interference in other countries' services within the framework of ITU. For the past 44 years, the Cuban people had been denied the right to chose their own representatives, express their opinions without fear of reprisals and assemble or organize freely. The recent crackdown on Cuba's peaceful opposition, in which 75 Cubans had been imprisoned after a series of show trials for exercising the freedoms of expression and opinion enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, was the latest example of the Cuban Government's fear of its own people. The Cuban Government's opposition to Radio y Television Marti was motivated by its panic at the idea that the Cuban people might have access to uncensored information on their own country and the world around them. The Castro regime was a dictatorship that denied the Cuban people their human rights and fundamental freedoms and had betrayed them politically and failed them economically.

69. Lastly, he quoted statements made on 7 April by Mr. Matsuura, Director- General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), urging the Cuban authorities the respect the fundamental rights of journalists and other individuals arrested for expressing their opinions. Referring to the Cuban's representative's mention o.' the need for a new world information order, he said that it was Cuba, not the world, that needed a new world information order based on truth and freedom.

The meeting was suspended at 5 p.m. and resumed at 5.30 p.m.

70. **Mr. Alzayani** (Bahrain) said that despite performing its tasks with considerable success, the Department of Public Information needed to renew itself in order to keep up with the changes facing the United Nations and carry out its worldwide activities more effectively by creating a new culture of excellence and periodically evaluating its work to take stock of both positive and negative aspects. The Department's transformation was intended to further enhance its activities to publicize United Nations achievements. In particular, the Department had increased its activities on behalf of African development and continued to lay a strong foundation for the coordination of human rights activities.

71. Information and the media played a crucial role in many spheres, such as development, development goals and the means to achieve them. If information was to play a constructive role, it must keep up with the latest developments in ICT and not use them to widen the gap between developed and developing countries. The United Nations could play a vital role in closing that

gap, especially through the Department of Public Information. ICT could be used to promote the interests of all the world's peoples, in keeping with the ICT goals of the Millennium Declaration.

72. The Secretary-General had done everything possible to help bridge the digital divide between developed and developing countries by establishing working groups and committees in accordance with the methodology indicated in General Assembly resolution 34/182 of 18 December 1979, which referred to the new world information and communication order and requested the Committee on Information to promote the establishment and progress of that new world order and to disseminate information to help countries enhance their communications capacity and their human resources so that everyone could benefit from the latest advances in ICT. That was reflected in the strategy adopted by UNESCO in November 1989.

73. The creation of regional information hubs was cause for concern. In order for information centres to be able to perform their assigned functions, the idea of merging them into regional hubs must be tested, studied on a case-by-case basis and subjected to a survey of opinion in host countries. The centres must be strengthened, empowered and revitalized so that their activities reach the maximum number of people, to which end they must be provided with modern means of communication with which to inform, educate and raise the awareness of the public with a view to promoting peace and security in the world and implement programmes for achieving economic, social and cultural goals. To achieve these objectives, the centres must have the necessary resources on United Nations activities, since the Organization was a collective forum for promoting peace and development.

74. The Palestine Information Programme of the Department of Public Information was commendable and his delegation hoped that it would continue until a just and equitable solution to the question of Palestine was achieved.

75. **Mr. Christen** (Switzerland) recalled that the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information had mentioned in his statement the survey conducted by the Pew Organization the previous month in 20 countries, which indicated that the image of the United Nations had worsened. However, there was at least one exception: according to a survey conducted in June in Switzerland, 77 per cent of Swiss people had a generally positive opinion of the United Nations, a 25-per-cent increase in favourable opinions compared with the results of the referendum on Switzerland's accession to United Nations membership held 18 months previously.

76. Obviously, the survey's findings had to do with the international situation, but they were also the result of a process of intense, honest communication to which the media had contributed with their reporting and analyses. The support given by the Department of Public Information to those media was also key to disseminating a clear, objective and realistic picture of the United Nations. His delegation believed that the Department's new structure responded to the need for modern, forward-looking communications. The Department's initiatives for improving the United Nations web sites and achieving genuine multilingualism were encouraging.

77. Since effectiveness also meant streamlined, rational financial management, his delegation welcomed the restructuring of United Nations information centres. Creating a regional hub in Europe to replace the nine existing national centres was a step in the right direction. Further such steps should be taken in the light of the results achieved with the European hub, but without losing sight of the fact that not all outcomes were transferable from one part of the world to another.

78. With regard to United Nations libraries, his delegation welcomed the establishment of a Steering Committee to design and apply strategies for the modernization and improvement of the libraries system, as the first step in its reform, and awaited the results with great interest. Nevertheless, it recalled its position with regard to the library of the Palais des Nations in Geneva which, given its historical importance as the centre where the League of Nations archives were kept, should not be the subject of centralized decisions that might be counterproductive.

79. Despite advances in ICT, the vast majority of people were as yet unable to benefit from the digital revolution. His delegation hoped that the World Summit on the Information Society would help improve that situation. It subscribed fully to the aim of the Summit - the establishment of an information society open to everyone - and recognized that it was essential to find solutions agreed among governments, the private sector, civil society and the media.

80. However, digital technology did not just mean technology but also content and freedom of expression. The principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights were the very foundation of the information society. As host country, Switzerland was determined to do everything possible to ensure that other countries recognized those principles as the building blocks of the information society. In that context, it welcomed the organization by the Department of Public Information of a parallel event, the World Electronic Media Forum, bringing together the main protagonists - primarily the media but also official political circles and non-governmental organizations with an important role in the information society.

81. Lastly, his delegation wished to express its sincere gratitude for its admission to the Committee on Information, which was the most important instrument for debating and defining the main communications policies of the United Nations.

82. **Mr. Zhanibekov** (Kazakhstan) reiterated his firm support for the Department's initiatives to improve the United Nations public information infrastructure. Those initiatives must take into account the differences that persisted among countries' capacities to disseminate information. His Government had set up a special programme intended to develop a national information structure in order to introduce a new technological culture into the economy, the public administration and the social sphere, using the latest information technology. Examples included the official Government web site and the creation of shared databases and an electronic archiving system for State institutions.

83. His delegation subscribed fully to the Secretary-General's view that there should be a communications culture at all levels of the United Nations as a means of keeping the peoples of the world fully informed and garnering widespread global support for the United Nations. In that connection, he believed that the measures taken by his Government would facilitate his country's integration in the international news community and the creation of a single information and communication area.

84. Lastly, the Department of Public Information needed to address issues related to the adverse economic, social, humanitarian and environmental consequences of the drying up of the Aral Sea and the many years of nuclear weapons testing in the Semipalatinsk region.

85. **Ms. Djajaprawira** (Indonesia) associated herself with the statement made by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and said that the reform of the Department was essential for providing more focused news services to a better identified public. The reform also offered a strong foundation for disseminating a culture of peace and strengthening respect among cultures and civilizations.

86. Her delegation attached particular importance to the bridging of the digital divide between developed and developing countries and was concerned that most of the world's population did not have access to the information and know-how on the Internet because 80 per cent of its content was in English. The development of contents in local languages was therefore indispensable if advances in information technology were to benefit peoples whose language of information and instruction was not English. If local languages were used, United Nations information centres' dissemination activities would obviously be more effective and would reach all social sectors.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.